

THE SEA-BIRDS

THE WONDERS OF NATURE



WONDERS OF THE SEA

WONDERS OF THE SHORE
THE LOBSTER AND HIS RELATIONS
THE STAR-FISH AND HIS RELATIONS
DWELLERS IN THE ROCK-POOLS
LIFE IN THE DEEP SEA
THE SEA-BIRDS

WONDERS OF INSECT LIFE

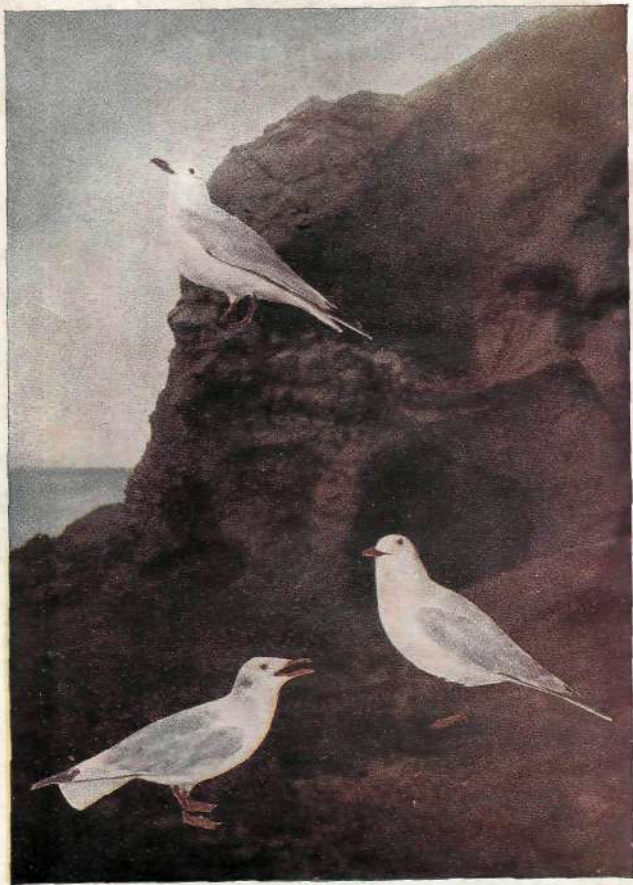
BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS
BEES, WASPS AND ANTS
BEETLES AND FLIES
IN POND AND STREAM
SOME CURIOUS INSECTS
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KITTIWAKES ON THE ROCKS

WONDERS OF THE SEA

THE SEA-BIRDS

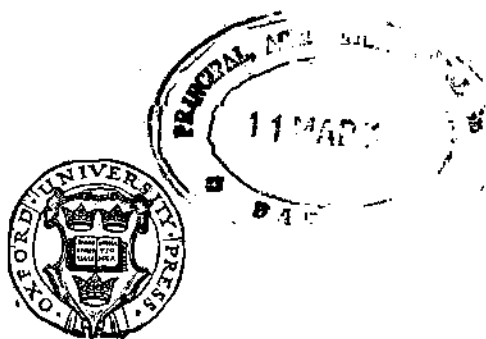
BY

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CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. BIRDS OF THE SEA	7
II. THE BLACK-HEADED GULL—THE HERRING GULL	12
III. THE COMMON GULL—THE BLACK-BACKED GULLS—THE SKUA—THE KITTIWAKES— THE TERNS	20
IV. THE GUILLEMOT—THE RAZOR-BILL	28
V. THE PUFFIN—THE AUKS	33
VI. THE GANNET	39
VII. THE CORMORANT—THE FRIGATE-BIRD	43
VIII. A SEA-BIRD NURSERY	48
IX. THE ALBATROSS—THE PETRELS	55
X. THE PENGUINS	61
XI. THE EIDER-DUCK—THE DIVING DUCKS—THE GREAT NORTHERN DIVER	66
XII. THE SHORE-BIRDS	71



THE SEA-BIRDS

CHAPTER I

BIRDS OF THE SEA

DOWN on the sea-shore the sun is shining, the sky is blue, and the sea is blue with little, frolicking, white-capped waves riding merrily in, to tumble head over heels on to the pebbly beach, and break themselves up into pools of foam, sending showers of salt sea-spray high into the air. What a delightful game it is to be sure !

Everything to-day seems bright and joyous, . . . flocks of laughing Sea-Gulls are circling overhead, their snowy plumage showing dazzling white against the deep blue of the sky, and every now and then they plunge down with shrill cries into the sea, and bob up and down like corks on the water.

There are so many delightful things at the sea-side : so much to do, so much to see, and

ling notes mingle with the loud ka-ka-ka of the excited gulls.

But now I am afraid we must spend no more time with the beautiful sea-birds—we must say “good-bye” to the sea. But I hope you have enjoyed the rambles we have had together over the shore, and all our little chats about the plants, the fish, the strange creatures, and the wild birds that belong to the wonderful Kingdom of the Sea.

so much to learn about all the wonderful creatures that belong to old Neptune's Kingdom.

The sea, as we know, has its own particular plants growing under the water, or just on the margin of the waves; its own particular animals, that live in the great depths of the ocean, or haunt the sea-girt shore; and it has, too, its own particular birds—bright, glorious creatures that are as much at home in the water, diving for fish, or riding high on the crests of the waves, as they are when on the wing, flying and wheeling in the sky above our heads.

It is no wonder that the people of old believed the sea-birds to be born of the wind and the waves. There is a pretty old legend that, long, long ago, before man appeared upon the face of the earth, the sea was raging and tossing its waves high into the air. The wild wind came rushing by, caught the white sea-foam and whirled it away, and it became changed into beautiful sea-birds—wild children of the wind and waves, belonging equally to the air and the sea.

Of course this is only a "fairy tale." We know that sea-birds are hatched from eggs

like all other birds ; but it is quite true that they lived ages and ages ago, in those far away days, before the coming of man, when all sorts of strange monsters roamed the earth, and the sea was full of weird creatures that have long since disappeared from the world. But the sea-birds are so well suited to the life they lead that in all these thousands of years they have changed very little ; and they are to-day very much the same as were their ancestors which lived such a long, long time ago.

The sea-birds that we know and love best are the gulls — beautiful creatures, with great strong wings and soft grey and white plumage. No matter what part of the coast you visit, you are almost sure to see some Sea-Gulls ; indeed there are very few parts of the world in which some member of the gull family is not found. Brave and hardy explorers have seen gulls circling and wheeling over the ice-floes on the ice-bound shores of the Polar regions.

All the gulls have webbed feet, like ducks' feet, so that they can swim and paddle about in the water ; big, strong wings to carry them safely great distances over the sea ; and powerful hooked beaks with which they snap up the

fishes, and crush the shells of many of the Molluscs.

The gulls that we most often see on our coasts are the Black-headed Gull and the Herring Gull, while the pretty little Kittiwake and the lesser Black-backed Gull are fairly common too.

When storms are approaching the gulls come flocking in to the coast, for they are "weather-wise" birds, and know quite well when bad weather may be expected. But they seem to delight in a high wind, and it is most amusing to watch the excited way in which they whirl about in it, screaming all the time, as if they thoroughly enjoyed being buffeted about.

In calmer weather the gulls are fond of riding on the waves, and it is very quaint to see the way they tuck in their wings and seem to sit down on the top of the water. They rise and fall happily on the crests of the waves, steering themselves with their webbed feet, their bright eyes keeping a sharp look-out for anything good to eat; and every now and then they dive down right under the water after the fishes swimming below. Then, suddenly, with a great flapping of wings, they

all rise together, and with loud, excited cries fly off to the rocks.

When the tide is out the gulls may often be seen on the sea-shore running about with funny little jerks, hunting for Worms and Molluscs, and snapping up the baby Crabs that have not been wise enough to hide themselves under stones or sea-weed, or sink down flat into the sand, as the older Crabs do.

Gulls are most terribly hungry birds, and will eat almost anything. They often follow steamers for miles for the sake of the scraps of food that are thrown overboard. They follow the shoals of Herrings, Pilchards and Mackerel and gobble up the fish in great quantities. They plunge into the rock-pools after the little shore-fish, and hunt over the rocks for Sea-Snails, Periwinkles and other shell-dwellers.

They are most knowing and intelligent birds, and if a gull happens to find a fine fat Mollusc, whose shell is too hard to crack, he will often fly up high into the air with it and drop it plump on to a rock. Then, if the shell does not break, he will fly up again and again with it, going higher each time, until at last

it is broken, and the clever gull can enjoy the nice plump morsel within.

In the winter-time, when food is scarce at sea and on the coast, the gulls come inland in great flocks; some even come to London, in the very cold weather, and we may see quantities of these beautiful birds wheeling over the river and catching the fish and bread that kind-hearted people throw to them.

In the early spring parties of gulls visit the country-side, where they are often seen following the plough, searching the freshly-turned ground for worms and grubs of all sorts—so they are very good friends to the farmers.

But with the return of warmer days back the gulls all flock to their true home—the free and open sea.

CHAPTER II

THE BLACK-HEADED GULL—THE HERRING GULL

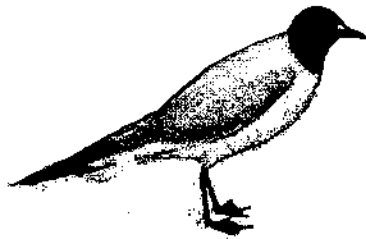
It is the Black-headed Gull that comes up to town in the cold weather, and does such good service to the farmer in the spring-time, by

THE BLACK-HEADED GULL 13

helping to clear the ground of the grubs that do so much harm to the crops.

The Black-headed Gull should really be called the Brown-headed Gull, as the feathers on its head are brown, and not black at all. But they are very dark, so that at a distance they look quite black.

It is only in the spring-time, in the nesting



BLACK-HEADED GULL IN SUMMER DRESS.

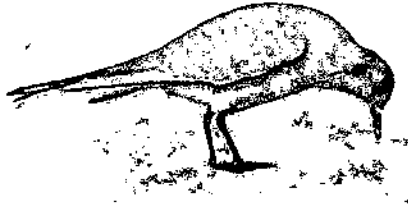
season, that the Black-headed Gulls wear their brown hoods ; in the winter the birds are all white, so many people, who only see them at that time, when they come up to town, would be surprised to hear they were called " Black-headed " Gulls.

When March comes in with blustering winds, the Black-headed Gulls flock in hundreds to the marshlands, fens, and Scottish lochs. Their strange wild cry is

welcomed by the fen and marshland dwellers, as it is a sure sign that spring is near.

Soon after all the gulls have arrived, a great commotion and bustling takes place as the birds choose their mates for the nesting season, and towards the end of April each pair sets busily to work on the important business of nest building.

The nests are made of dried grasses and

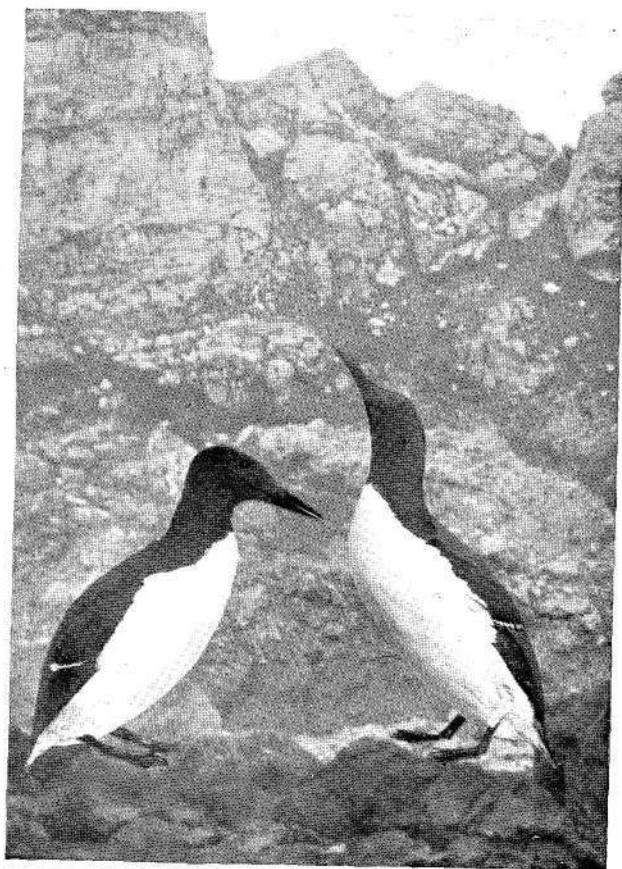


BLACK-HEADED GULL IN WINTER DRESS.

broken reeds—very rough and untidy affairs they are, but they are always carefully placed on some safe spot on the marshy ground, where the water will not flow into them, and so spoil the precious eggs.

Two or three large, dark-green eggs, covered with patches of black and brown, are laid in each nest, and mother gull sits on them patiently, keeping them nice and warm until they are hatched. Then the little downy





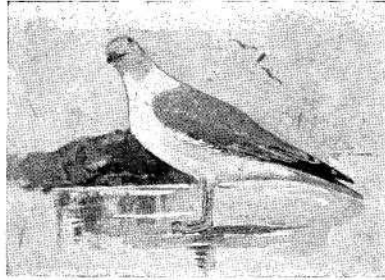
GUILLEMOTS

THE BLACK-HEADED GULL 15

baby gulls nestle snugly under her feathers until they are ready to leave the nest.

The baby gulls do not waste much time, but in a few days are out and about, paddling in the shallow marshland waters, swimming in and out of the tall tangled rushes, trying to catch flies and worms with their little beaks.

The parent birds are kept busy now, hunting for worms and other soft creatures to feed the hungry youngsters; and



YOUNG BLACK-HEADED GULL.

hard work it is, I can assure you, to find enough food to satisfy the little gulls.

But as spring gives way to summer with its sunny days and blue skies, the gulls begin to grow restless, and as soon as the young ones are strong and able to fly away, they all go off to the sea. The young gulls now have a simply lovely time, gobbling up sand-hoppers, sea-worms and any insects they can find on the wet, sandy shores, bobbing up and down on

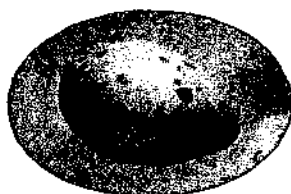
the waves, or trying the strength of their wings by circling round and round with wild excited cries over the tossing sea. Through the autumn and winter the Black-headed Gulls stay at the sea-side (unless they are driven inland by very bad weather), but the return of spring sends them flocking back to the marshes once more.

The Herring Gull is sometimes called the "Silvery Gull," as its plumage is a pretty, silvery-grey colour. It is a strong, handsome bird, and nearly always to be seen round the coast in the spring and summer-time. But the Herring Gull does not like cold weather, so it does not stay with us all the year round, as the Black-headed Gull does, but when winter approaches wings its way across the sea to the warm, sunny coasts of North Africa.

As one would suppose from their name, the Herring Gulls are particularly fond of Herrings. They follow the shoals in great excitement, skimming along over the surface of the sea, every now and then plunging into the water and out again with a glittering fish in their beaks. Sometimes they rise high into the air, and then with a sudden swoop dart down, and, with wings held high above their heads, just

pat the water with their feet, seize a fish, and fly off with it. All the time the gulls are fishing they scream with excitement, making such a noise that they attract the attention of the fishermen and show them whereabouts the Herrings are; and in this way the gulls are often useful, although they are sadly blamed for eating so many fishes.

The Herring Gull does not nest on the marshlands as its black-headed cousin does, but chooses for its nursery, ledges on tall cliffs, or the tops of high rocks with the sea splashing at their base, and the blue sky overhead. In such precipitous places the bird lays its large speckled eggs, on a rough kind of nest made with a few fronds of sea-weed, and perhaps a tuft or two of grass pulled from the top of the cliffs.



EGG OF HERRING-GULL.

The baby Herring Gulls are the most funny-looking little birds, with round balls of bodies covered with speckled down, and heads that are spotted all over like a spotted-dog pudding. They have round beady eyes and long,

yellow bills, and very long, thin legs—rather like stilts—ending in large, flat, webbed feet. They are most intelligent little fellows and make delightful pets, but it is not kind to take

the wild birds away from the sea and the free happy life they lead.

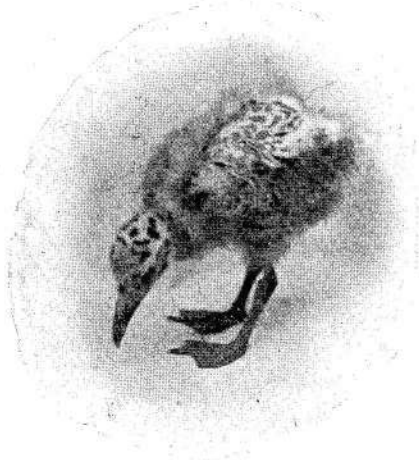


A BABY HERRING GULL.

Once, however, we had a young gull brought to us that had fallen from its rocky nursery. It was not much hurt, but the poor little thing could not fly, and it was not possible to put it back in its nest,

high up on the towering cliff. So we took the baby gull home with us, and did all we could to make its life happy. "Billy," as we called him, soon became quite tame, and would come running and flapping to meet us whenever we went into the garden, where he had free range, and then would walk

up and down on the lawn beside us, and, looking up at us, with his head a little bit on one side, would "talk" the whole time. He had a large tub full of water, and in this Billy loved



BABY HERRING GULL.

to dive and splash ; and he very soon learnt to plunge in and bring out the stones and sticks that we threw into the water—just as a dog does. I must say that he was rather mischievous, for he would put anything he could find into the water ; and handkerchiefs, letters, reels of silk, and all sorts of odds and ends were often found in Billy's tub.

If left too long by himself, Billy would feel lonely, and sometimes he would come into the house to look for his friends ; and he was once found in the study pulling the coals out of the scuttle with his beak, scattering them all over the floor, and screaming with delight at the mess he was making.

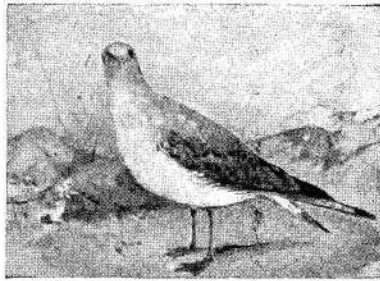
CHAPTER III

THE COMMON GULL—THE BLACK-BACKED GULLS
— THE SKUA — THE KITTIWAKES — THE
TERNs

STRANGELY enough the gull that is named the " Common Gull " is one of the most uncommon of all the gulls on the English coast. It is a fine, handsome bird with soft grey plumage, black wing-feathers, and in the summer-time its head and neck are snowy white. But the Common Gull only pays us occasional visits in the winter-time, although it still nests on the shores of Scotland and Ireland.

A handsome bird is the Lesser Black-backed Gull with its snowy white breast and wings, and back of deep blue-black. It is a large and

powerful bird with a great strong beak; but, although such a fine fellow, I am sorry to say the Black-backed Gull (or "Saddle-back" as it is sometimes called) does not bear at all a good character; for it is a terrible thief and steals the eggs out of the other sea-birds' nests, sticking its beak right through them, and then flying off with a loud ha-ha-ha! This bad bird even kills the wee downy fledglings sometimes, so it is a great enemy to all the other sea-birds.

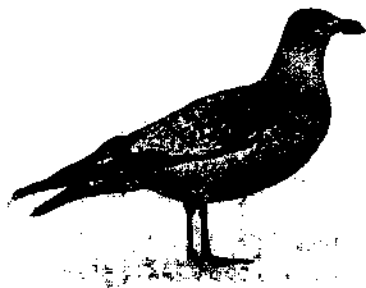


BLACK-BACKED GULL

These gulls like best to make their nests on the sloping banks of green, grass-covered cliffs, on lonely shores or islands where they are not likely to be disturbed. The nests are very slightly made, with just a few tufts of dried grass, and the large eggs are very much the same in appearance as the eggs of the Herring Gull.

The young Black-backed Gulls are not

dressed like their parents in glossy black and white, but, until they are four years old, they wear speckled suits of dull white and grey. And so like are they in colour to the grey weather-stained rocks, that, when at rest, it is most difficult to see them. The young gulls know this quite well, and, if they are frightened,



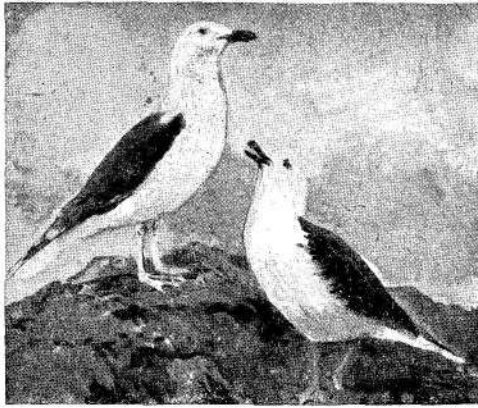
YOUNG BLACK-BACKED GULL.

they crouch down amongst the rocks and stones and remain perfectly motionless until all danger is passed. And so the young Black-headed Gulls are protected by their dull, mottled plumage until they are old enough and strong enough to hold their own amongst the grown-up sea-birds.

There is another gull called the "Greater Black-backed Gull" which bears an even worse character than its smaller cousin,

THE BLACK-BACKED GULLS 23

for not only does it steal the eggs and devour the young of other sea-birds, but it sometimes attacks and kills poor, helpless, little lambs and baby deer. It is such a fierce, wild bird that it kills and eats nearly every small living creature it can find—fish, rats, mice or frogs,



GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULLS.

it is all the same to this great robber gull; and one cannot help feeling glad that it is not so often seen on our shores as its more peacefully disposed relations. Large flocks of the Greater Black-backed Gulls, however, sometimes visit the English coast, but they very seldom nest here.

But the chief of the robber birds is the Great

Skua, a kind of gull that lives chiefly in colder regions. It is a great strong fellow, one of the biggest of all the sea-birds, measuring as much as two feet, or more, from the tip of its beak to the tip of its tail. The Skua's webbed feet are furnished with strong sharp claws, with which it fiercely attacks and kills other birds.



SKUA.

You would think that such great strong birds would surely be able to catch their own food, but the Skuas are lazy as well as being terrible bullies. They watch smaller birds—gulls and terns—busily fishing for their dinner, and force them to give up the fish they have caught for themselves. Singling out its victim, the great dark Skua swoops down upon it with such fury that the poor frightened

12772

THE KITTIWAKES

" Nat. 25

bird drops its fish in a hurry and flies off as fast as it can; while, so quick in its flight is the robber bird, it darts after the fish, and nearly always snaps it up before it reaches the water.

The Great Skuas are only occasional visitors to our coasts. They live far north, making their nests amongst ice-bound rocks, or on the towering cliffs that gird the shores of the Shetland Islands, that lie away to the North of Scotland. Many of these wild, rugged islands are the homes of countless sea-birds—and the fierce robber bird is King of them all.

Very different indeed is the pretty little Kittiwake, one of the smallest of the gulls. It is a gentle, dainty bird with large dark eyes, pale yellow bill, and plumage that is snowy-white, except on the back, where it is a soft delicate grey. The Kittiwake is one of our "resident" gulls, and its strange cry of *Kitty-wake, Kitty-wa-ake*, is heard in the summer-time on many parts of the coast. Its nest is made, on the ledges of high cliffs, of sea-weed sometimes mixed with dried grasses, pulled from the top of the cliffs. The Kittiwake takes more trouble about its nest than most gulls do, building it carefully, and binding



it together with mud from the sea-shore, so that the spotted, stone-coloured eggs may rest safely within it and not roll off the ledge down into the sea below. The baby Kittiwakes are dear, fluffy little things, and their first plumage is much the same as the parent bird's, only there are some black feathers mixed



TERN.

with the soft grey ones on the back and on the wings.

Beautiful little sea-birds are the Terns. They belong to the gull family, but they are smaller and daintier in their ways. Terns are often called Sea-Swallows, and really,

although they are not related, they are like the true swallows in many ways, for they have long, narrow, pointed wings, forked tails, and soft grey and white plumage, and black heads.

The Common Tern we may often see on the Southern coasts, hawking backwards and forwards over the shores for insects, or skimming gracefully over the water on the look-out for tiny fishes. It nests on the sea-shore, making a little shallow pit in the sand or shingle to receive the "clutch" of two or three large eggs.

The Black Tern, a bird of darker plumage than the Common Tern, always nests on the marshes, and builds its nest of dried grass and wrack-weed so cleverly that it floats on the water, rising and falling with the tide without letting the water in to spoil the eggs. Sometimes, however, for greater safety, the Black Tern places its nest on a hummock rising above the shallow waters of the marsh.

The Common Tern and the Black Tern are most often seen on the English coast; but the beautiful White-winged Black Tern pays us an occasional visit, and the "Noddy," a Tern that lives on the tropic seas, is sometimes seen on the coasts of Ireland. The Noddy has been

given its funny name by the sailors, because it allows itself to be caught so easily when it alights on a ship to rest.

CHAPTER IV

THE GUILLEMOT—THE RAZOR-BILL

THERE are many other sea-birds besides the gulls to be seen round about our coasts. The Guillemot, or "the Ducker" as it is sometimes called, is one of our constant summer visitors. It is a large and rather quaint-looking bird; its wings and tail are short, and its legs set so far back that when it is sitting down it looks just as if it were standing up on its tail. It has a long snaky neck that it twists and turns about in the funniest manner, so that it often looks as if its head were screwed on the wrong way.

In the summer-time the Guillemot has a white breast, and its head, wings, and back are a sooty-brown colour, while its feet, legs, and bill are black. But in the winter the plumage on its head changes to white, or white speckled with brown.

The flight of the Guillemot is somewhat heavy, on account of the shortness of its wings, and it waddles along in a funny, awkward manner when it tries to walk on land ; but it floats as lightly as a boat upon the water, and dives most beautifully.

The Guillemot has gained its second name, the Ducker, from the way in which it ducks right under the water after the fish. It stays down under the



BABY GUILLEMOTS.

water for quite a long time, and then suddenly bobs up again ever so far away, where you least expect to see it.

Guillemots are sociable birds, and like company when they are hatching their eggs ; indeed, so closely do they crowd together, that the tops of rocks and the narrow ledges, high up on the cliffs, are often simply packed with birds, and there is not standing or sitting-room for another one. Late comers are some-

times seen scrambling and tumbling about on the top of the other birds, trying vainly to squeeze themselves in.

The Guillemots only lay one egg apiece, but that one is very large. They make no attempt at nest building, but simply lay their solitary eggs on the hard, bare rock, and then sit bolt upright on them, all huddled together as close as can be. They keep bobbing up and down and twisting their necks about in the most laughable manner, and are constantly quarrelling with each other and trying to get a little more "elbow room." If anything alarms them, up they all fly in a whirling feathery cloud ; but as soon as the danger has passed away, the Guillemots come down again, and a tremendous pushing and shuffling and bickering goes on, until they are at last all settled on their own eggs once more. And how, amongst so many, each bird succeeds in finding its own egg again is a mystery ! but I fancy the colour of the egg has something to do with it, for you very rarely find two Guillemots' eggs that are exactly alike. They may be dark blue, light blue, or a greenish blue, cream colour, or occasionally a deep claret ; and then they are spotted and scribbled all

over with black, each one in a different way. So I suppose that is how the birds can distinguish the eggs one from another.

You would think, with all this pushing and scrambling, the eggs would soon all be knocked off the slippery rocks and narrow cliff ledges, on which they are placed without so much as a frond of sea-weed to keep them from rolling away. If the eggs were round, this would certainly be the case, and very few little Guillemots would ever be safely hatched; but they are long and sharply-pointed at one end, much the shape of a peg-top, in fact, without the peg. The consequence is, that when the eggs are kicked by the struggling Guillemots, instead of rolling off the rocks and falling plump into the sea, they simply revolve—roll round and round on the spot on which they are lying.

In spite of their curious, protective shape, however, some of the eggs do now and then tumble into the sea, and I am afraid the birds well deserve the name of "The Foolish Guillemots."

The "Razor-bill" is very much like the Guillemot in general appearance, but it has not so long a neck, and the plumage on its

head, back, and wings, is black instead of brown. Its beak, too, is differently shaped—the Guillemot has a slender, pointed bill, while the Razor-bill's (as its name suggests) is bluntly rounded, like a razor.



RAZOR-BILL.

In the spring-time, the Guillemots and the Razor-bills congregate in great numbers on the same parts of the coast, and their habits are very much alike; but the Razor-bills do not crowd together so closely as the Guillemots do, and

like to place their eggs, for greater safety, in a little nook or cranny in the rock.

The Razor-bill, like the Guillemots, only lays one egg; it is very large, and either white or a pale brown colour, with black marks on it. Both the parent birds sit on the egg—taking turn and turn about; and when the little one

is hatched, they both bring freshly-caught fish to feed the baby Razor-bill, so the lucky little bird gets plenty to eat.

CHAPTER V

THE PUFFIN—THE AUKS

THE Puffins are the funniest-looking birds with their plump little bodies, short stumpy tails, big round heads, and enormous brightly-coloured bills which look ever so much too big for the quaint little birds.

The Puffins are dressed in black and white—white shirts and black coats and caps; but their faces are a pale lavender colour, and their legs and feet are brilliant red. In the spring and summer-time the huge bill is covered with a kind of sheath, banded with blue-grey, orange-red, and yellow, and it has a bright crimson tip. But after the nesting season, the Puffin moults and sheds this gaudy sheath, so that in the winter the beak, although still absurdly large for the size of the little bird, is not so brilliant in hue.

This funny bill is very much the same shape

as a Parrot's bill, and so the little Puffin is often called the "Sea-Parrot."

The Puffin lays but one egg which is placed for preference at the end of a short tunnel, or a hole, made in the soft, peaty soil that often covers the tops of high cliffs, and the small islands round about the coast. Sometimes the Puffins scoop out little tunnels for themselves, but more often they take advantage of ready-made nesting-places, and the rabbit-burrows on the cliffs and islands are often occupied by these quaint little "Sea-Parrots." Sometimes, however, the Puffins lay their eggs in hollows or crevices in the cliffs, or under loose rocks and boulders high up on the shore out of the reach of the waves. On the cliff-heads on the coast of the North Sea, hundreds of Puffins may often be seen sunning themselves in the mouths of their burrows, or perched about on the rocks.

The grown-up birds feed on fish, little Crabs, Shrimps, or any other small sea-animal they can catch; but the little nestlings that are covered with sooty-black down, are given only the fry of fish to eat. The funny big beak is very useful to the parent bird when it has a baby Puffin at home always looking

eagerly out for food, for it can catch several little sand Eels, or other tiny fish at one time with it, and carry them home all in a row. And the funny little bird may often be seen returning from a fishing expedition with six or seven little fishes dangling from its absurd-looking beak.

The Puffins, Razor-bills and Guillemots all belong to the Auk family, and in many ways these birds are much alike. They all have short wings and tails, and all have their legs set very far back so that they move about most awkwardly on land, and sit bolt upright on their tails like little dogs begging. But all the Auks are splendid divers, and are almost as much at home beneath the surface of the water as they are when floating on the top.

A very old family indeed are the Auks. Their ancestors lived on the sea, and nested amongst the frozen rocks, thousands and thousands of years ago, in prehistoric times. The head of the family was the Great Auk or Garefowl, a strange bird as big as a large goose. Like most of its descendants the Great Auk was dressed in black and white, and on its black head was a most curious white spot that looked like a great white eye, just below

its real eye. But the strangest thing about the Great Auk was its wings; they were so small that they were of no use at all for flying, but were just like two little flippers, and the Garefowl used them as paddles to

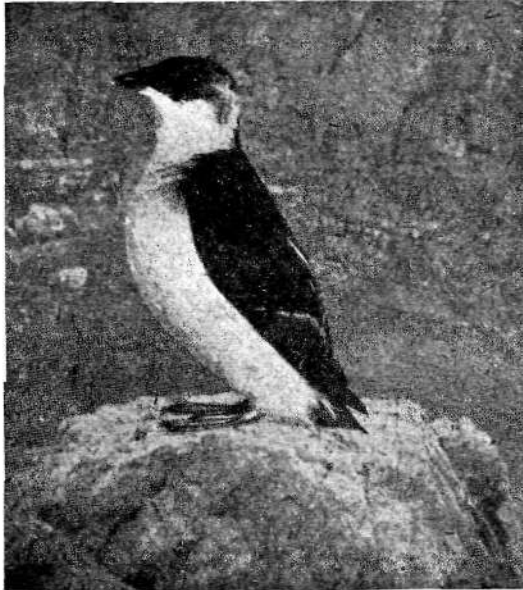


GREAT AUK.

paddle its way along through the water. In this way the curious bird was able to travel great distances over the sea.

Less than a hundred years ago the Great Auks were still nesting on a few rocky islands near Iceland, and off the coast of Newfoundland. But, sad to say, there are no Garefowls living now, for, when it was discovered where

the birds went in the summer-time, parties of men went over year after year to the islands and most cruelly killed the poor



LITTLE AUK.

things in thousands for the sake of the feathers. As they could not fly, the unhappy birds could not escape, and soon not one was left alive. The very last pair of Great Auks is believed to have been killed in 1844.

It does seem sad to think that man, who

should be the protector of all creatures weaker than himself, should be so cruel and greedy as to slaughter poor helpless birds in this savage manner. No one will ever see a Great Auk alive again, for, although it is easy to destroy life, nothing man can do will ever bring it back again. We should think of this, and be very careful how we thoughtlessly take away the wonderful gift of life from even the least of God's creatures.

Although the Great Auk is extinct, I am glad to say the Little Auk still lives—far away in the colder regions of the Arctic Circle. The wise little bird lays its solitary egg deep down amongst loose fragments of rock, so that it is very difficult indeed for "egg-collectors" to get it out. The Little Auk is quite a small bird, about as big as a pigeon; it has a very short beak, funny little legs, and black and white plumage like its cousins the Razor-bill and Puffin. The Little Auk pays us an occasional winter visit, but it is seldom seen farther south than the northern coasts of Scotland.

CHAPTER VI

THE GANNET

THE Gannet is a very large bird, rather like a goose in appearance. Indeed, its second name of "Solan Goose" suits it very well, although it is not of course any relation to the cackling farmyard goose that we see waddling along with such a dignified air when we pay a visit to the country.

The Gannet has beautiful white plumage, except on the head and neck, where it is a pale buff colour, and the quill feather of the wings, which are black. It has strawberry-coloured eyes, a white beak, and legs that are green in front and black behind.

When on land the Gannet is rather a clumsy-looking bird, as its large body and short legs make it awkward and ungainly in its walk ; but it has a graceful and majestic flight, and it is a fine sight to see a flock of these noble birds soaring aloft and sailing through the air on their great strong wings. The Gannet swims well, too, but above all it is a splendid diver.

To see this great white bird fishing for its dinner is a most remarkable sight. It does not eat all sorts of things as so many sea-birds do, but is very particular indeed about its food—freshly-caught fish alone will content the Gannet. It follows shoals of Herrings



GANNET.

and Pilchards, and rises above them, up and up into the air, until it is quite a hundred feet above the surface of the sea. Then singling out a fish that is swimming ever so far beneath it with its bright eye, the Gannet half-closes its wings and plunges down head-first as if

it were falling from the sky. Just before it reaches the water it claps its wings quite close to its sides, and in it goes with a splash, sending showers of spray high into the air. So quick and sure is this fisher-bird that he very rarely indeed misses his mark.

You would think that by striking the water

with such force in this way the Gannet would hurt itself; but to prevent this, on its breast, just under the skin, are a number of little sacks, and when the great bird hurls itself down through the air it inflates these sacks, so that its breast is covered with a lot of little air-cushions which break the force of the impact with the water.

The Gannets make quite large nests of mixed sea-weed and grasses, but they are rather untidy, clumsy affairs. The nests are placed in niches and on ledges of steep rock cliffs, and as close together as possible; for Gannets are friendly birds, and like the companionship of their fellows during the long, tedious time they are patiently sitting hatching their eggs. Very quaint they look, too, as they sit solemnly on their nests all facing the cliff with their backs turned towards the sea. One egg only is laid by each bird; the shell is a pale bluish colour, but it is so thickly covered with a coating of chalk that it looks quite white.

The baby Gannets are funny little things—when first hatched they are really quite ugly, as they have no feathers at all, but are simply covered with a bluish-black skin. In a short

time, however, they become covered with a soft, fluffy, white down that sticks out all over them, so that they look like balls of cotton-wool or powder-puffs. When the little birds change their downy covering for their first feather suit, they are not at all like their parents, but are dressed in sooty-black with spots and streaks of greyish-white. Not until they are four years old do the young Gannets wear snowy suits of feathers and become grown-up birds.

We may see Gannets on many parts of the British coast, but they only nest in a few special places—on Lundy Island (an island in the Bristol Channel), some parts of Ireland, and on one or two places on the North coast. But the chief haunt of the Gannet is the great Bass Rock of Scotland—an island-rock from which, on three sides, the cliffs rise sheer out of the sea to a height of over 300 feet. Here, in the spring-time, the birds assemble in tens of thousands, occupying every nook and ledge and jutting crag on the towering cliffs, so that, at some little distance away, the Bass Rock looks as if it were covered with snow.

Gannets are often blamed for the amount of fish they catch and eat. Fishermen grumble

and say they take too many Herrings and Pilchards, and spoil their fishing. But there are, as you know, so many fishes in the sea that there are really plenty for everyone; and I think, don't you, that the birds have quite as much right to fish for their food as we have, and it is too bad to grudge them their fair share. The Gannets help the fishermen, too, for by watching whereabouts the birds are fishing, the men know where they will find the shoals of Herrings and Pilchards, and so often catch a great deal more fish than they would if they had not the help of the fisher-bird.

CHAPTER VII

THE CORMORANT—THE FRIGATE-BIRD

You could hardly find two sea-birds that look more unlike each other than the Gannet and the Cormorant; and yet these two birds are very closely related—they are first cousins, in fact.

The Cormorant is common on many parts of the British coast. It does not confine itself to the sea-shore, but is often seen on the

marshes and on the banks and mud-flats at the mouths of rivers.

A strange-looking bird is the Cormorant in its dark suit of greenish-black. It has a long snaky neck, and a very small head for its size,



CORMORANT.

which is bald on the top—except in the nesting season when it grows a white crest.

The Cormorant cannot be called a graceful bird; on land it straddles about on its short legs in a very clumsy fashion, and in the air it flaps its way along in a heavy manner, although it is very quick and strong on the wing.

It is fond of perching on the edges of rocks, or on any post that sticks up in the sea,

and will sit quite motionless for a long time together, its head sunk between its hunched-up shoulders; or with neck outstretched, and dark wings spread out in the sunshine.

From its point of vantage the strange bird watches the rippling water for passing fish, then suddenly pounces down on them and disappears entirely under the water. After gobbling up the fish it comes up again and returns once more to its perch.

At other times, when on the look-out for food, the Cormorant paddles itself along in the sea, and often swims for quite a long time with its head and long neck thrust right under the water. If it seizes a fish crossways in its beak, so that it cannot swallow it, the Cormorant tosses it into the air and cleverly catches it again, head or tail foremost, so that it slips easily down its long throat.

Cormorants are most dreadfully greedy birds, they will go on eating and eating until they simply cannot swallow another mouthful. Even then they are not content, but will still go on catching fish and trying in vain to gulp it down.

Cormorants are serious birds. They do not wheel about and fly hither and thither in the

excited way that gulls do. They make up their minds where they want to go, and steadily flap their way straight to the chosen spot. Although by no means handsome birds, they look very proud, and take some trouble with their toilets. You may often see an old Cormorant perched up on a rock ruffling up its feathers, preening them with its bill, or smoothing them down with the comb-like middle claw of its webbed foot, while it carefully balances itself on one leg.

Cormorants are sociable birds, and live together in large colonies on the rocks; but now and then you may see a solitary bird living apart by itself, and having nothing to do with the rest of the community.

The nests are very large, and are made of sticks and sea-weed; but they are always very dirty and untidy. Two or three eggs are usually laid, although sometimes only one, or as many as four, may be found in a nest. Father and Mother Cormorant share the work of hatching the eggs, each sitting on the nest in turn while the other one takes a little rest and exercise. They feed their young in a very curious way—first they fly off and catch some fish, but instead of carrying it to the

baby birds in their beaks, as most birds do, they swallow it. Then back they go to the nest and open their mouths wide, and the young Cormorants put their heads right down their parents' throats and help themselves to the half-digested fish.

These strange birds are wonderfully intelligent. In China and Japan they are tamed and taught to catch fish for their masters. At first, collars are fastened round their necks, so that they cannot swallow the fish they catch, and cords are fastened to the collars to prevent the birds flying away. But the Cormorants very soon learn what they have to do, and then they are allowed to fish without the collars; and the clever birds always bring all the fish they catch to their masters until, as a reward for their good behaviour, they are told they may fish for themselves.

On the Western coasts of Scotland and Ireland, a smaller Cormorant is seen called the Shag. Its plumage is dark green, but otherwise it is much the same as its bigger cousin.

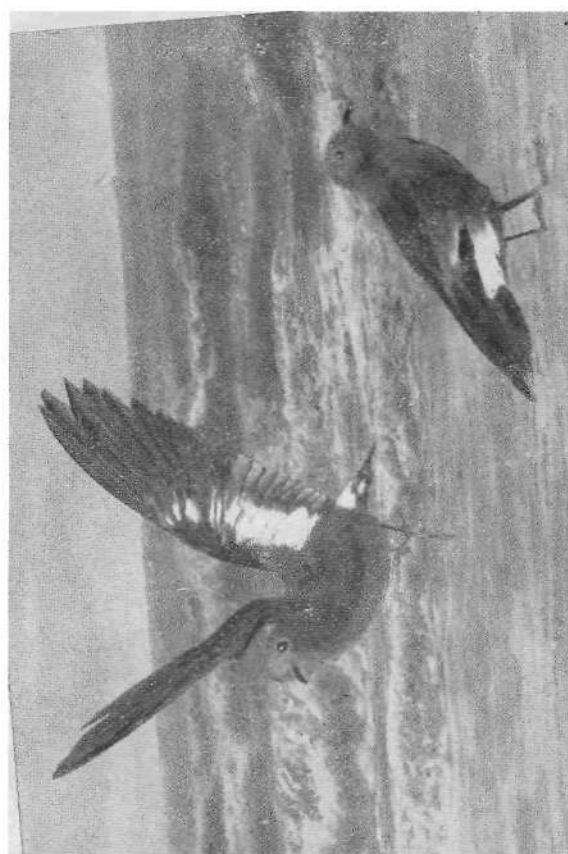
The Gannet and Cormorant have a very interesting relation called the Frigate-bird, that lives abroad on the tropic seas. It is a

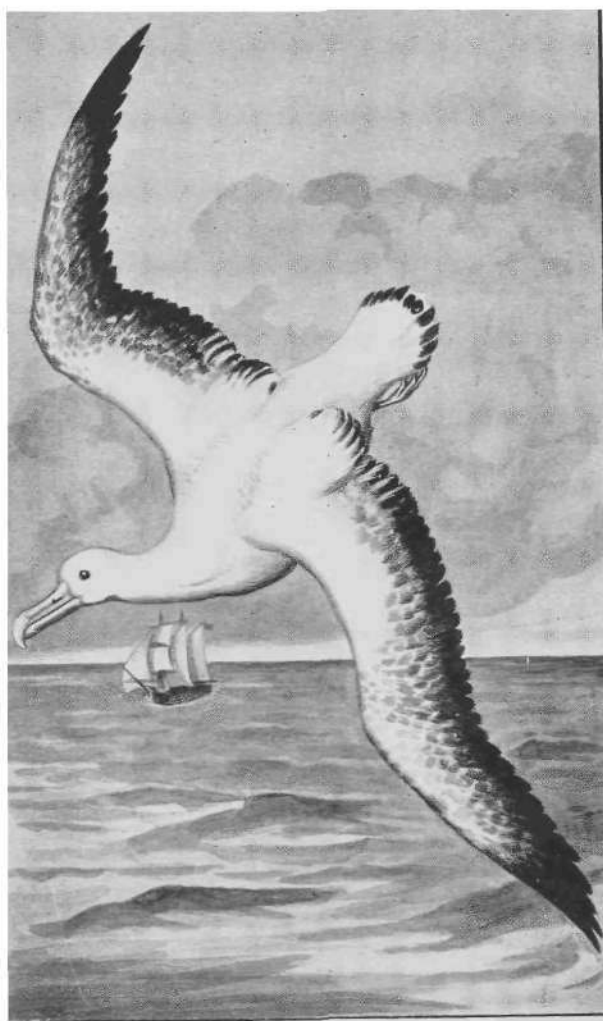
beautiful, active bird, very swift and graceful on the wing ; and it has been given the charming name of "Son-of-the-Sun." But I am afraid the Frigate-bird can never have learned the old saying, "handsome is as handsome does," for it has very wicked ways, and is as great a robber as the Skua Gull. Although it spends nearly all its life at sea, the bad Frigate-bird is too lazy to fish for itself, but prefers to steal the fish from other birds. Sometimes a big Gull or a Gannet does not wish to give up its dinner, and tries to fly off with it in a hurry. But the Frigate-bird is after it at once, and catching it by the tail gives it a good shake, so that the poor bird drops the fish in a fright.

CHAPTER VIII

A SEA-BIRD NURSERY

MANY sea-birds live for months together entirely on the sea and on the wing. Light as the sea-foam they float on the water, rocked up and down by the tossing waves, or soar aloft on their strong wings, wheeling and sailing through the air ; only now and then do





they rest for awhile on the rocks and reefs that jut out here and there from the sea.

The sea is their true home—from it they obtain their food, and on it they rest when tired of flying through the air. But although the birds can live, feed, and even sleep far away out on the ocean, there is one thing they cannot do there—they cannot lay their eggs and bring up their children in the air or on the water. For this the birds must come to the land, and as surely as the nesting seasons comes round, the sea-birds come flocking into the coast.

In the spring-time they come, streaming in from every quarter ; and many birds travel hundreds of miles across the water and fall quite exhausted on the shore. And just as the Swallows, and the Martins that build under the eaves of our houses, come back year after year to the same spot, so the sea-birds return again and again to the same rocky nursery. Round about our coasts are many sea-bird nurseries, on wild, rocky parts of the shore, where precipitous cliffs tower aloft, or grass-covered banks slope steeply down to the sea.

Above all, the birds love a lonely island on which to nest, where man with his tiresome

inquisitive ways is not likely to disturb them. There are several such islands off the coast of Scotland; and a little group of islets in the North Sea, about five or six miles from the coast of Northumberland, called the "Farne Islands," is a true birds' paradise. Here, there is everything that the heart of a sea-bird can desire—high cliffs, sandy shores, grassy slopes, piles of boulders, and many great flat-topped rocks entirely surrounded by the sea, where they may nest undisturbed.

To this "Sea-bird Kingdom" the sea-birds flock every year in tens of thousands—Herring Gulls, Black-backed Gulls, the pretty Kittiwakes, and the graceful little Sea-Swallows. Here, too, come the Gannets, the Guillemots, the Razor-bills, the quaint little Puffins with their funny big beaks, and the dark Cormorants with their long snaky necks and harsh cry.

The islands are simply full of birds, and you can just imagine what a hubbub and commotion there is as they all choose their nesting-places for the season; and I am afraid there is a good deal of quarrelling, too, when two or three birds take a fancy to the same spot. Each kind of bird has its own particular place

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A SEA-BIRD NURSERY

51

on the islands — the Herring Gulls choose the most inaccessible crags, the foolish Guillemots push and jostle one another on the tops of rocks or on the narrow ledges high up



PUFFINS SUNNING THEMSELVES ON THE ROCKS.

on the cliffs; the Kittiwakes form a colony apart, and although they keep near together, they do not like to be crowded, so each pair takes possession of a little ledge jutting out from the cliff where there is but just room for two. The tops of the cliffs are covered with little Puffins in their burrows, like rabbits in a warren, and all the nooks and crannies of the

rocks are occupied by Razor-bills; on the sandy shores the little Terns lay their eggs, and the Cormorants crowd together on many of the rocks.

What a busy scene it is as the birds fly backwards and forwards with pieces of seaweed, tufts of grass and sometimes whole plants of the sea-campion pulled up by the roots, with which to make their nests. Of course the Guillemots and Razor-bills take no part in nest building, but they fly about and quarrel and scream, and add to the general excitement, while the Puffins busily scrape little tunnels for themselves, or pop in and out of the rabbit holes choosing a comfortable place to lay their eggs.

But later in the year, when the eggs are all hatched, there is even more bustle and excitement on the islands, as then the nurseries are full of baby birds all eagerly clamouring for food, and the parent birds have enough to do to satisfy the hungry youngsters. Gannets are plunging headlong into the sea, Guillemots and Razor-bills diving or paddling under the water, Puffins are bobbing up and down on the waves, or flying back to their solitary little ones with six or seven tiny fish

dangling from their beaks, while clouds of gulls are wheeling about overhead, and dashing in and out of the sea—all as busy as busy can be catching fish to take home to their babies.

As the summer days grow longer, the little sea-birds grow apace, and, as soon as they are big enough, they learn to fly, and swim, and dive, and to catch fish for themselves. They paddle in the sea, and run about on the shore, gobbling up baby Crabs and Sand-hoppers, and are just as happy as the day is long. But at the first sign of danger, the young birds crouch down amongst the rocks and stones, and keep quite still so that they are not easily seen.

But the young sea-birds' play-time does not last long. Towards the close of summer, the older birds begin to get excited and restless, and parties of birds are continually leaving the islands, taking the young ones with them to see the world. And before the first cold winter days arrive, they are all gone; some to warmer shores, and others to spend long months flying backwards and forwards over the water, and floating on the surface of the sea—and in the rocky nurseries of the sea-birds all is quiet and still.

The Farne Islands have been the summer home of countless numbers of sea-birds for many ages past. Long years ago a good old monk, called St Cuthbert, built himself a little hut on one of the islands and lived there alone with only the wild sea-birds to keep him company. St Cuthbert was so fond of the birds that he was never tired of watching them, and he would allow no one to hurt or disturb them, so that he was called the "protector of the sea-birds."

The good old saint no longer guards his beloved birds, but they are still taken care of by watchers, who live on the islands during the nesting season to see that people do not come over from the mainland to kill the birds and steal their eggs. For, unfortunately, there are many people so thoughtless and cruel that they do not care how much suffering they cause our feathered friends by taking all their eggs from them, to sell to collectors, and killing their young ones for the sake of their plumage.

I wish that every girl and boy would be like good St Cuthbert, a "protector of the birds." You cannot of course all go and live on lonely islands, but you can all do a great deal to

protect the beautiful wild birds—not only the sea-birds, but all our lovely land-birds too. Every boy may help, if he will give up taking the eggs away from the poor mother-birds, and by being very careful not to frighten or disturb them when they are sitting on their nests. And every girl may help, if she will give up wearing the wings and feathers of the poor murdered birds in her hats, and wear pretty bright ribbons or flowers instead.

Let us all join in doing our utmost to save the birds from being so cruelly persecuted, and try to persuade others to protect them too.

CHAPTER IX

THE ALBATROSS—THE PETRELS

THE biggest of all the sea-birds is the Albatross. From beak to tail it often measures quite four feet, while its outstretched wings are as much as ten or twelve feet across, from tip to tip. These great wings are very narrow for their length, but they are very strong, and the flight of the Albatross is one of the most wonderful sights to be seen at sea.

With wings outstretched, this great bird will sometimes follow a big ship for hundreds of miles across the ocean; and although the ship moves very fast, not only does the Albatross keep up with it for days together, but it sweeps round and round it in wide circles of many miles in extent. So that really the bird goes farther and faster than the great ship.

The Albatross does not fly like other birds—poised on its long graceful wings, it seems rather to float and sail through the air. It sweeps along very much in the same way as an aeroplane does, and you may watch the bird for hours, yet never see a movement of its wings. It does, of course, alter their position sometimes, but the movement is so quick that it is almost impossible for the eye to follow it.

The Albatross follows the ships for the sake of the scraps thrown into the sea; for this splendid bird is not at all particular about its food, and, like the gulls, will eat almost anything, good or bad. Of course it likes fresh fish, and it is fond of Cuttle-fish and Jelly-fish too; but it will make a hearty meal of a dead whale or any dead fish it may chance to find. When food is plentiful, the Albatross will eat

so much that it is not able to fly, and then for some time it rests motionless upon the water. Although it is by far the biggest and swiftest of the sea-birds, it is by no means the strongest or the bravest, for it often allows the Sea-Eagle and the Great Skua Gull to rob it of its food.

Although when sailing majestically through the air, on its long, tapering wings, the Albatross is such a splendid sight, like so many sea-birds it looks rather ungainly when on land. In calm weather it has great difficulty in rising into the air from level ground, and is obliged to start its flight from a rock or hillock. But when a strong wind is blowing, the Albatross faces the wind, opens wide its great wings and mounts up into the air like a kite. It is quite at home in a rough wind, and speeds before a raging gale with the swiftness of a rocket.

The Albatross is often called "The Wanderer" because it is constantly on the wing, wandering here and there over the ocean. Its plumage is a creamy-white, but the wings are banded with black, and the quill feathers have a dusky hue. Its bill is a pale pink colour, shading to yellow at the tip.

There is another Albatross called the

"Sooty Albatross," from the colour of its plumage, which is a dark brownish-grey, and a yellow-beaked Albatross that sailors call a "Mollymauk," though I do not know why it has been given such a funny name. But neither the Sooty Albatross nor the Mollymauk is as big or as well known as the "Wanderer."

The Albatrosses belong to a family of birds called the Petrels. There are a great many different Petrels; they are nearly all inhabitants of the Southern Ocean, and are mostly seen far from land skimming over the water, often following ships in hope of picking up something good to eat. The Petrels spend most of their lives at sea—flying over the water or resting on the waves, only coming to land in the nesting season, when they flock to lonely islands or solitary rocks in the southern seas to lay their eggs.

Most of the Petrels are small-sized birds; but the Giant Petrel, although not nearly so big as his cousin the Wanderer, is a fine fellow with an expanse of wing measuring nearly six feet across, and is the second largest of all the sea-birds.

But the Giant Petrels are not very nice birds; they feed chiefly on dead things—

seals, whales, fish and birds. They are like vultures in the way they find out at once when anything has been killed, and numbers of them will fly straight to the spot and begin quarrelling and fighting over the carcase.

Sailors call the Giant Petrels by all sorts of funny names — “Nellies,” “Break-bones,” and “Stinkers.” The last name has been given to the birds on account of their exceedingly unpleasant habit of squirting a nasty oily fluid from their beaks and nostrils, if anyone goes near them when they are busy eating, or resting after a meal. Even the baby birds do this should anyone approach their nests or burrows. But although it is certainly not nice, to be splashed all over in this way, I do not think we can altogether blame the birds for their rude behaviour, as, after all, it is only their way of protecting themselves from their enemies.

Very different indeed from the great Giant Petrels are the Storm Petrels or “Mother Carey’s Chickens” as the sailors call them. These little birds are no bigger than larks; they are the smallest of all web-footed birds, and yet in their flight and general appearance they are wonderfully like their huge cousin

the "Wanderer." But the plumage of the little Storm Petrels is sooty-black, except just near the tail where there is a patch of white.

Dainty little birds are the Storm Petrels; they are often seen in large companies, skimming along over the surface of the sea with their legs hanging down, every now and then patting the water with their tiny webbed feet, so that they look just as if they were running over the waves. It is from this habit that the birds have gained their name. Petrel means "little Peter," and the little Storm Petrels are said to walk on the water as we are told that St Peter did in the old Bible story.

The Storm Petrels are no favourites with the sailors; they will tell you that the tiny birds bring bad weather. It is true that when a storm is brewing, flocks of Storm Petrels are often seen skimming over the water in a very excited manner; but it is, of course, quite a mistake to say that they are the cause of the storm. The truth is that the rough waves bring quantities of tiny Squids and other little sea-creatures up to the top of the sea, and the Storm Petrels are simply having a good meal.

The Storm Petrels come farther north than most of their relations, and nest on several parts of the British coast; on the Scilly Islands and Lundy Island in the South of England, and on the Farne Islands in the North.

CHAPTER X

THE PENGUINS

If you have seen the Penguins at the Zoo, I am sure you will agree that they are quite the funniest of all the sea-birds. They really look much like little old gentlemen dressed in nice, warm dressing-gowns down to their heels; and they strut along bolt upright on their flat feet with such a solemn, dignified air, that it is impossible to help laughing at them.

In one way the Penguins are like the poor extinct Great Auk, for they cannot fly as other birds do. Their wings are very small, just two little flippers and, as the Penguins waddle sedately along holding out these

funny wings, they look so exactly like arms, that when two of these quaint birds meet you almost expect to see them shake hands.

But although these wings are no good to fly with, they are very useful in the water, for the Penguins use them as paddles, and paddle about in the sea almost as porpoises and seals do. Sometimes, too, they crawl on their wings and webbed feet, so that they look more like four-legged animals than birds. But usually when on land the Penguins walk about on their short, thick legs in an upright position, taking little shuffling steps over the ground; and where the shore slopes down to the sea, they throw themselves flat on their breasts and toboggan down into the water with a delightful splash. In the water the Penguins are thoroughly at home; they splash, and paddle, and swim, and leap right out of the water, and dive after the fish which is the only food they care to eat.

The Emperor Penguin is the biggest of all the Penguins, which is just what one would expect in a royal bird. Not without reason does he wear such a thick, warm coat, for he lives in the very coldest part of the world—on the frozen shores of the Antarctic Ocean, on the way to the South Pole. His feathery

robe is white in front, but the back is dark grey, and his head and throat are nearly black. A full-grown Emperor stands nearly three and a half feet high, and he often holds his beak up in the air, which gives him a proud and haughty look.

\ Penguins are often called "stupid" because they are so easily knocked over and killed; but I do not think this is due to stupidity, for the Penguins that live in such cold, lonely places hardly ever see such a thing as a man, so have not learned to fear him. When parties of explorers now and then invade their frozen kingdom, the birds are most surprised to see them, and waddle up to them to see what these strange creatures can be; and they bow up and down and wave their flippers in the most polite and friendly fashion. Perhaps they think the men are only very large Penguins, as they walk upright on two legs just as the birds do themselves.

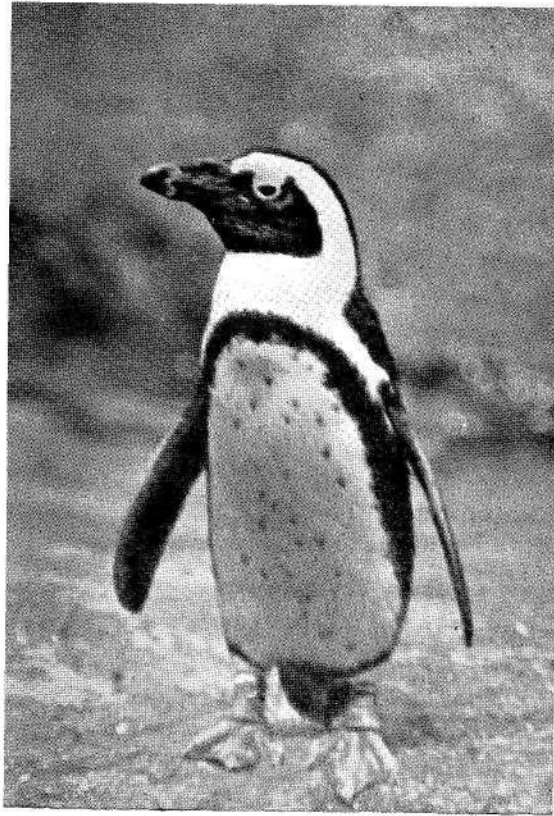
In one way, indeed, the Emperor Penguins are anything but stupid, for they hatch their eggs in a very clever way. They make no nests, in fact there is nothing to make them of, for all around there are only great masses of ice, and vast plains and banks of frozen

snow. Now an egg cannot be hatched without warmth; if it were placed on the ice or snow it would simply freeze into a solid lump of ice, and no little Penguin chick would ever come out of it.

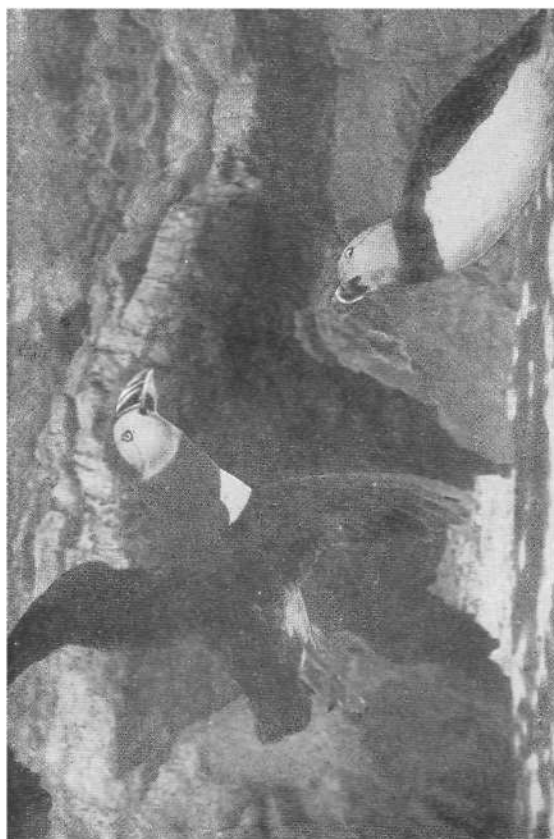
So the wise old birds put their eggs on their flat webbed feet, and crouch down on them so that they are closely covered with their thick warm feathers. The Emperor Penguins only lay one egg each, and when the little chick is hatched, it continues for some time to sit on its parent's feet, nestling cosily under the warm soft feathers.

But in spite of all this care, the eggs do not always hatch, and many chicks die of cold; so that usually there are many more grown-up birds than young ones in a Penguin rookery, and sometimes ten or twelve birds will all help to feed and nurse the same little chick.

The King Penguins are nearly as big as the Emperor Penguins, and they are much the same in their habits. They do not however live in quite such cold regions, but are found in most of the islands in the Antarctic Ocean. On some of these islands the shore is very cold and muddy, and in the nesting season the King Penguins may be seen perched on stones,



CAPE PENGUIN



each with an egg on its feet to keep it safely out of the puddles and mud.

The young King Penguins are covered with soft, long, brown down, and look very much like little brown bears ; but the young Emperor Penguins are dressed in silvery white.

The smallest member of the Penguin family is the little Blue Penguin, whose home is on the shores of South Australia and New Zealand. This little bird is only about eighteen inches high when it stands upright on its flat webbed feet. The plumage on its breast is dazzling white, but its back and head are clothed with pale blue feathers instead of the dull grey or blackish coat that most of its relations wear.

All the Penguins live away in the southern seas. They much prefer cold weather, indeed many of them die directly if they are carried to warmer climes. The Cape Penguins live together in large colonies, and it is the funniest sight to see a company of them come out of the water and march off to the rookery one behind the other like a file of soldiers.

The Rock-hopper is one of the crested Penguins. It is a most quaint-looking bird, with two long, yellow, feathery tufts, one on

each side of its head. It has gained its name from the funny way it has of putting its feet close together and hopping along from rock to rock. And the Jackass Penguin is so-called from its curious cry, which sounds very much like the braying of a donkey.

CHAPTER XI

THE EIDER-DUCK—THE DIVING-DUCKS—THE GREAT NORTHERN DIVER

THE most important of the sea- or diving-ducks is the Eider-duck. It is only a winter visitor to England, but it makes its nest on the Farne Islands, and many islands round the Scottish coast. The true home of the Eider-duck, however, is farther north still, on the shores of Iceland, Greenland and Norway; and on some of the cold islands in the Arctic Ocean there are such numbers of these birds, and their nests are so close together, that it is quite difficult to walk without stepping on them.

The Eiders are fine large birds, about as big

as a goose. The ducks and the young drakes are a rusty brown colour with black streaks and spots ; but the full-grown drakes are more smartly dressed, particularly in the nesting season. They then wear suits of snowy white, with black caps, waistcoats, and tail feathers, and their cheeks are a pale sea-green ; but the pretty white plumage disappears with the autumn moult, and then the drakes wear a complete suit of dull sooty-grey.

The Eider-duck makes a good-sized nest of fine sea-weeds, often matted together with moss and small twigs, when these things can be found near by ; and in the nest five pale green eggs are usually laid. But sometimes a duck may have seven or eight eggs in her nest, and it is said that the lady Eiders are not always strictly honest, and that sometimes when a duck leaves her nest for a few minutes to stretch her wings, another one will hop off her own nest, seize one of her neighbour's eggs in her beak, and add it to her own store.

But if the ducks do steal each other's eggs now and then they are at least good, kind mothers, and just before the eggs are hatched they pluck the soft grey down from their own breasts and fill the nests with it ; so, when

the little ducklings break their shells and pop out their heads, they find themselves snugly tucked up under a nice, warm, eider-down quilt.

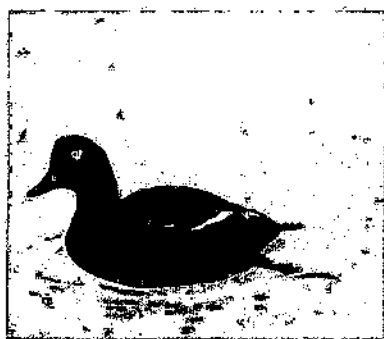
It is this soft grey down that is so valuable, and in many parts of Iceland and Norway the people take away the down from the nests twice, and each time the mother birds pluck more down from their breasts to replace it. The third time the down is not taken but left in the nests to keep the little ducklings warm; and, if the ducks have not enough left, then the drakes will sometimes pluck out their feathers to help cover the eggs.

Beyond this occasional help, the drakes take no part in hatching and bringing up the ducklings, but leave all the work to the poor ducks, while they paddle about in the water, and have a good time gobbling up sand-hoppers, little crabs, shrimps, and any nice molluscs they can find.

The Eider-ducks are very curious birds; they seem to like loud noises and bright colours, so the Iceland people hang up gay coloured cloths and ring bells to attract them to their land; and they also cut rows of holes in the banks to induce them to nest there. The

Eider-ducks are quite pleased with these kind attentions, and come flocking in to the nesting grounds, and then the down is collected and sold, and made into pillows and eider-down quilts.

The diving ducks that visit our shores are nearly all winter visitors, and only a few can



VELVET SCOTER.

be rightly called sea-birds. In the cold wintry months skeins of wild duck are often seen flying in from the sea, but they are on their way to the marshes and the inland waters. But the Scoter, a glossy-black bird with an orange line on the tip of its bill, is a true marine duck ; and on some parts of the coast such numbers of Scoters appear in the winter

months that the water looks quite black with them, as they swim about on the look-out for molluscs on which they feed. The Pochard or Dun-bird, too, with its black collar and bib, is seen on many parts of the coast, from October until the end of March. These ducks dive



GREAT NORTHERN DIVER.

down right to the bottom of the water after the water plants, and the crabs and other little crustaceans that hide amongst them. But the Dun-birds are shy, and chiefly feed at night.

In the winter, too, we may see the Great Northern Diver, which is perhaps the most expert of all the diving birds. It is not a duck but a sea-bird that is distantly related to the Auks and the Penguins. It is a fine-looking bird with a white breast, and the rest of its plumage black; its wings and back are spotted with white, and the head shines with gleaming tints of green and blue. But when the Great Northern Diver pays us its annual visit, it is not nearly such a striking-looking bird, for it is

then wearing its winter garb of brownish-grey, as like all birds it keeps its best suit for the nesting season. The Diver is sometimes called the Loon, because it walks so very badly on land, in fact it can only just stumble along; but in the water it is wonderfully graceful, and can dive down, down under the water ever so far after the fish, and sometimes it does not come up again for quite eight minutes. As soon as the winter is passed, the Great Northern Diver leaves us and wings its way to the cold regions in the North, and its strange wild cry, which is rather like the howl of a wolf, is heard no more until the cold days come back again.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHORE-BIRDS

BEFORE saying good-bye to the sea, we must not forget to look for the shore-birds—birds that, like many plants and curious little creatures, live on the borderlands of Neptune's Kingdom. Many shore-birds are only visitors, coming in the spring and again in the autumn

on their way to and from their nurseries in the North. In the spring-time the birds arrive in great beauty, dressed in all their best array, as it is then the nesting season, when birds don their gayest, brightest plumage; but in the autumn on their return journey southward, they are more soberly clad in dull greys and browns.

In the autumn large flocks of Dunlins or Ox-birds come crowding into the coast. Sometimes such numbers settle on the sea-beach that they form large dark patches on the shore which can be seen quite a long way off. Should you come near to them, up they all fly at once in a regular cloud and wheel swiftly out to sea, keeping just above the reach of the leaping waves. They do not go very far, however, but soon return, still keeping close together, and settle down once more to rest farther along the shore.

The Dunlins are pretty little birds not much bigger than a Song-Thrush. They have long, slender bills, and in the winter are grey and white; but in the spring and summer their plumage is reddish-brown with a great deal of black in it, and they have a black mark like a horse-shoe on their breasts.

The Dunlins love to rest on the low sand-banks that run out into the sea on many parts of the coast, and when the tide is up may often be seen standing on one leg, with their bills tucked under their shoulder feathers, taking a nap. But although they may all appear fast asleep, there is always one bird here and there keeping watch, to give the alarm if danger approaches, when, with shrill piping cries, they are all off in a twinkling.

The Knot is a common winter visitor to our shores, coming in the autumn and departing again in the spring. It is larger than the Dunlin, and its plumage is grey and white; but, in the spring-time, it has a ruddy waist-coat, and its back is black, barred with pale brown. It is most amusing to watch a party of Knots on the sea-shore, going through all sorts of funny antics in their search for food. They follow the retreating tide, and, thrusting their long bills deep down into the sand, bring up the wriggling sea-worms from their burrows. They are even quick enough sometimes to catch the wily Solan before it disappears under ground.

When the tide is low we may sometimes see little companies of Oyster-catchers, or Sea-

pies, running about over the shore. They are smart-looking birds with black and white plumage, pale pink legs, and orange-coloured bills. The bills are curiously shaped; they are long and flat, quite straight and rather thick, but taper at the tip like a wedge.

When the sea is calm the Oyster-catchers are sometimes seen swimming in the water, but they prefer, like all wading birds, to paddle in shallow pools, and run about over flat stretches of shore and low weed-covered rocks, hunting for something to eat. Oyster-catcher is not a good name for these birds, for although they like oysters well enough when they can get them, they eat far more mussels, whelks, sea-snails and limpets, with little fish, crabs and shrimps by way of a change.

The Oyster-catcher is very clever in the way in which it knocks the limpets off the rocks with a swift blow of its strong bill, and opens mussels by pushing the straight, flat tip between the two valves of the shells and forcing them apart.

In the spring-time the Turnstones may be seen running eagerly about the shore, turning

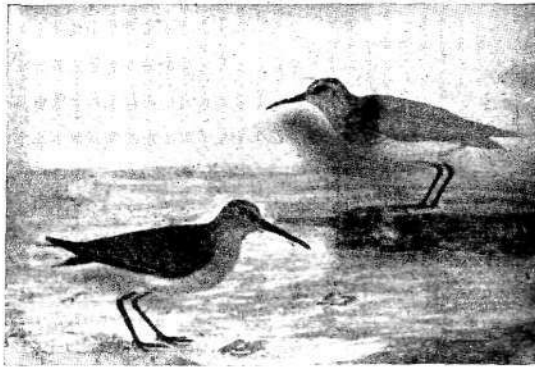
over the sea-weed and shingle to find the sand-hoppers that are hiding underneath. They are rather like the Oyster-catchers, but are not such large birds, nor have they such long flat bills. The Sanderlings, too, assemble in great numbers on our coasts in the spring and early autumn. They are the smallest of the wading birds, with fat little bodies and long thin legs.

In the spring-time, too, the pretty little Ringed Plovers are seen feeding in the pools down by the sea ; and further up on the beach, beyond the reach of the waves, you may chance to find their eggs (generally three together) lying on the shingle, often in a cosy nook between sheltering sand-dunes. If you *do* find them, be very careful not to disturb them ; but the eggs are so like the stones that most people will pass by without seeing what is lying at their feet.

The Sand-pipers are with us in the summer-time. They are graceful little birds with long legs and short tails, and may be distinguished from the other waders by their quick restless ways. They are never still for an instant, but always on the alert running about on the margin of the sea when the tide is out, or flying backwards and forwards in a very great hurry.



The noisy Redshank you may know by his long red legs and yellow, black-tipped bill. He can swim very well, and is more often seen on the water than most of the waders. The Redshank is a winter visitor to the coast, as is

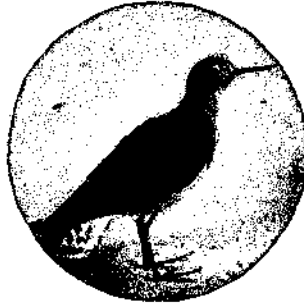


SAND-PIPERS.

also the Greenshank, a larger bird with green legs and feet, and a black bill that curves slightly upwards.

The Godwit, too, has a beak that is turned upwards at the tip. He is quite a large bird about the size of a Kittiwake, and is sometimes seen running very fast over the sands in hot pursuit of the crabs, which scuttle away as fast as they can and try to reach the sea before the Godwit can catch them.

Larger still is the great Curlew, the biggest of our wading birds. It has a long slender bill curved downwards like a scimitar, which it plunges deep into the soft mud in search of food. In the summer the Curlews flock to the marshes and green uplands, but later in the year they come down to the sea, and in the cold, grey, wintry evenings their mournful cry *cur-loo-ee, cur-loo-ee* may be heard as the birds wing their way back from the feeding grounds.



GREEN SAND-PIPER.

The waders love flat, muddy shores, for these are splendid feeding grounds, with plenty of worms, and crabs, and shrimps, and other nice things that birds like to eat. At the mouths of rivers, and in the harbours when the tide is low, you may see quantities of wading-birds in company with Gulls and Cormorants, all busily engaged in hunting over the mud banks and the shallow pools, and eagerly gobbling up all the little creatures they can find, while their shrill piping and whist-